

Story 1821 (1970 Tape 16)

Narrator: Unidentified old
man who told 1817,
1820

Location: Karaağaç village,
Karacabey kaza,
Bursa Province

Date: 1970

Disgraced in Distinguished Style

There was an Albanian¹ who had written a letter to a friend of his in İstanbul. His handwriting was clear enough for the letter itself, but he wanted the address on the envelope to be written with more attractive penmanship. He decided to find a hoca² to write the address for him. He went to a large market square, where there were many people walking about, and looked for a hoca. Back in those days it was easy to recognize hocas because they always wore turbans.³ When he finally saw a

¹Although the protagonist is said to be an Albanian, there is nothing in this tale to identify him ethnically. Like the Laz, the Albanian is sometimes stereotyped as a numskull in Turkish tales.

²Now simply a preacher, a hoca was in pre-Republican times both preacher and teacher.

³During much of the Ottoman period, hocas did indeed wear turbans, though they were not the only men who wore that type of headgear. Learned men and government officials (including sultans) wore turbans.

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turbaned man, he said, "Hoca Efendi,⁴ will you please write an address on this envelope for me?"

"All right. I shall write it," said the hoca, taking out his pen. "Tell me what the address is."

Albanian said, "Chief Gardener in İstanbul,
A Basket Loaded on His Back,
The Basket Filled with Cabbages,
A Clump of Leeks Held in His Hand."

hoca was so amused by this address that after he had written it, he added a line of his own: "A Radish Stuck into His Butt." Then he said, "There! I have written the address."

"Read it," said the Albanian.

The hoca read the address:

"Chief Gardener in İstanbul,
A Basket Loaded on His Back,
The Basket Filled with Cabbages,
A Clump of Leeks Held in His Hand,
(A Radish Stuck into His Butt)."

⁴Once a term of respect applied to a male superior in status to the speaker, Efendi is used now only when speaking to a child or a servant.

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But the hoca did not say the last line aloud; he read it just to himself.

When the Albanian looked at the envelope, however, he saw the final line at once and said, "Aman,⁵ Hoca! Remove that last line, for it could disgrace us!"

"It has already been written. I cannot remove it without destroying the envelope."

Staring at the beautiful penmanship of the address, the Albanian sighed and said, "Well, anyway, everyone will see how elegantly we have been disgraced."

⁵An exclamation meaning, Alas! or Oh, my goodness!